1: McGee E-5 (1894-1895)1898 NU31 Seri NU31

impaired than their fear-born veneration evaporated, and their native antipathy reappeared in original virulence. The 1894 party was fortunate in successfully treating a sick wife of sub-chief Mashém, and subsequently spent days in the rancherías, distributing gifts to old and young in a manner unprecedented in their experience and making liberal exchanges for such small possessions as they wished to spare; yet, with a single possible exception, they succeeded in bringing no more human expression to any Seri face or eye than curiosity, avidity for food, studied indifference, and shrouded or snarling disgust. Among themselves they were fairly cheerful, and the families were unobtrusively affectionate; yet the cheerfulness was always chilled and often banished by the approach of an alien. The Sonorenses generally hold the Seri in indescribably deep dread as uncanny and savage monsters lying beyond the human pale; while the reciprocal feeling on the part of the Seri toward Caucasians, and still more toward Indian aliens, seems akin to that of the average man toward the rattlesnake, which he flees or slays without pause for thought—it seems nothing less than intuitive and involuntary loathing. The Seri antipathy is at once deepened into an obsession and crystallized into a cult; the highest virtue in their calendar is the shedding of alien blood; and their normal impulse on meeting an alien is to kill unless deterred by fear, to flee if the way is clear, and to fawn treacherously for better opportunity if neither natural course lies open.

Concordantly with their primary characteristic, the Seri have avoided ethnic and demotic union beyond the narrow limits of their own kindred; and even of these they seem to have cast out parts, annihilating the Guayma and Upangnayma, displacing and nearly destroying the Tepoka, and outlawing individuals and (apparently) small groups. The earlier chronicles indicate that the Jesuit missionaries, and after them the Franciscan friars and the secular officials, sought to scatter the tribe by both cajolery and coercion, and endeavored to divide families by restraint of women and children and by banishment of wives; there are loose traditions, too, of the capture and enslavement of Indian and Caucasian women in Seriland; yet the great fact remains that not a single mixed-blood Seri is known to exist, and that no more than two of the blood (Kolusio and perhaps one other) now live voluntarily beyond the territorial and consanguineal confines of the tribe. The romantic story of a white slave and ancestress of a Seri clan, sometimes diffused through pernicious reportorial activity, is without shadow of proof or probability; the tradition of the captivity of a Papago belle was corroborated, albeit indefinitely, by Mashém's naive admission that an alien woman was once kept as a slave to a childless death due to her inaptitude for long wanderings; and there is not a single known fact indicating even so much as miscibility of the Seri blood with that of other varieties of the genus *Homo*. Naturally the presumption of miscibility holds in the absence of direct evidence; yet the presumption

1: McGee E-5 (1894-1895)1898 NU31 Seri NU31

412 rubbing face-paint, for bruising woody tissue to aid in breaking ocatilla poles for house-frames or mesquite roots for harpoons (both afterward finished by firing), and on occasion for weapons; and this many-functioned tool is initially but a wave-worn pebble, is artificially shaped only by the wear of use, and is incontinently discarded when sharp edges are produced by use or fortuitous fracture. The hupf is supplemented chiefly by the simple perforator of mandible or bone or fire-hardened wood; and these two primitive implements, together with mollusean shells in natural condition, apparently serve as the primary tools for all the mechanical operations of the tribe.

726 The dearth of tools and the absence not only of knives but of knife-sense among the Seri illumine those traditions of Seri fighting made tangible by the teeth-torn arm of Jesus Omada; for they explain the alleged recourse of the Seri warriors to nature's weapons, used in the centripetal fashion characteristic of nascent intelligence.

186 The Seri are distinguished by another trait hardly less striking than the pedestrian habit, and even more conspicuous than the tooth-and-nail habit with the correlative absence of tool-sense; the trait is not tangible enough for ready definition or description in terms (of course because so unusual as not to have bred words for its expression), but is akin to—or, more properly, an exceeding intensification of—race-pride in all its protean manifestations; it may be called *race-sense*. Like other primitive folk, the Seri are self-centered (or egocentric) in individual thought, i. e., they habitually think of the extraneous phenomena of their little universe with reference to self, as in the labyrinth of consanguineal relationship extending and ramifying from the speaker; furthermore, they typify primitive culture in their collective thinking, which is tribe-centered (or ethnocentric), i. e., they view extraneous things, especially those of animate nature, with reference to the tribe, like all those lowly folk who denote themselves by the most dignified terms in their vocabulary and designate aliens by opprobrious epithets; but the Seri surpass most, if not all, other tribes in dignifying themselves and derogating contemporary aliens. Concordantly with this habitual sentiment, they glory in their strength and swiftness, and are inordinately proud of their fine figures and excessively vain of their luxuriant locks—indeed, they seem to exalt their own bodies and their own kind well toward, if not beyond, the verge of inchoate deification. The obverse of the same sentiment appears in the hereditary hate and horror of aliens attested by their history, by their persistent blood-thirst, and by the rigorous marriage regulations adapted to the maintenance of tribal purity; for just as their highest virtue is the shedding of alien blood, so is their blackest crime the transmission of their own blood into alien channels. The potency of the sentiment is established by the unparalleled isolation of the tribe after centuries of contact with Caucasians, by their irreducible love of native soil, by their implacable animosity toward invaders, and by

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their rigorously maintained purity of blood; it is manifested in their commonplace conduct by a singular combination of hauteur and servility, forbidding association with aliens on terms of equality. The entire group at Costa Rica in 1894 were on good behavior, partly, no doubt, for profit, partly because they were at peace bought by bloodshed; yet they kept an impassable gulf between themselves and the Caucasians, and a still wider chasm against the Papago and Yaqui. They came to the tanque, usually in groups, rarely alone, always alert; especially when alone or in twos or threes, they moved slowly and stealthily in their peculiar collected and up-stepping gait, often stopping, always glancing furtively with roving eyes, and bearing a curious air of self-repression—as of the camp-prowling coyote who seems to hold down his instinctively bristling mane by voluntary effort. And the visitor to their rancheria sent a wave of influence before as his approach was noted; laughter ceased, languor disappeared, and a forced, yet sullen, amiability took their place, though the children and females edged away; if he appeared unexpectedly or came too close, the children and younger adults simply flitted like young partridges, while the elders stiffened rigidly, with bristling brows and everting lips and purpling eyes, perhaps accompanied by harsh gutturization—indeed the curiously canine snarl and growl, often evoked by the stranger unintentionally, betrayed the bitterness of Seri antipathy toward even the most tolerable aliens. Every human is panoplied in a personality, perhaps intangible but none the less real, which repels undue approach and fixes limits to familiarity on the part of strangers, friends, kinsmen, and mates, according to their respective degrees of mutually elective affinity; but the Seri are so close to each other and so far from all others that they are collectively panoplied against extra-tribal personalties even as are antipathetic animals against each other—and the Seri can no more control the involuntary snarl and growl at the approach of the alien than can the hunting-dog at sight or smell of the timber-wolf.

While the highly developed traits represented by pedestrian habit and hand-and-tooth habit and segregative habit expressing race-sense are conspicuous during exercise, each carries an equally well-marked obverse. Thus, while the Seri are known as runners par excellence in a region of runners, and were named by aboriginal neighbors from their spryness of movement, they have been no less notorious among the Caucasian settlers of two generations for unparalleled laziness—for a lethargic sloth beyond that of sluggish ox and somnolent swine, which was an irritating marvel to the patient padres of the eighteenth century, and is today a byword in the even-tempered Land of Mañana; concordantly the sinewy hands and muscular jaws are noticeably inert during the intervals between intense functionings, are practically free from the spontaneous or nervous movements of habitually busy persons, and contribute by their immobility to the air of indolence or languor which

1: McGee E-5 (1894-1895)1898 NU31 Seri NU31

131 especially as they are reflected in the primitive minds of the local tribe; and careful study of the habits and history of the Seri shows that the dangerous strait has been a potent factor in preserving tribal existence and perpetuating tribal integrity. Naturally the factor operates through
502 navigation; for it is by means of this art that the tribesmen are able to
609 avoid or to repel the rare invaders of either mainland or insular portions of their province, the overland pioneers from the east being stopped by the strait and the maritime explorers from south and west being unable to maintain themselves long about the stormy shores and never outfitted for pushing far toward the mainland retreats and strongholds; while by means of their light and simple craft the Seri were able to retreat or to advance across the strait as readily as over the adjacent lands to which they were wonted by the experience of generations. In their minds, indeed, El Infiernillo is the nucleus of their province. So the Seri were among the lowliest learners of that lesson of highest statecraft, that lands are not divided but united by intervening sea; and their ill-formulated and provincial notions are of much significance in their bearing on autochthonous habits and habitats.

501 The water craft of which the Seri make so good use is a balsa, made of three bundles of carrizal or cane lashed together alongside, measuring barely 4 feet abeam, 1½ feet in depth, and some 30 feet in length over all. A fine specimen (except for a slight injury at one end) is shown in plan and profile in plate XXXI. It was obtained near Boca Infierno in 1895, partly towed and partly paddled thence to Embarcadero Andrade, wagoned laboriously across Desierto Encinas and on to Hermosillo, conveyed in an iron-sheathed box on two gondolas of the narrow-gage Ferrocarril de Sonora to the international frontier, and finally freighted to the United States National Museum, where (in the Mall just outside the building) the photographs reproduced in the plate were taken.

396 The manufacture of the balsa has never been seen by Caucasian eyes, but the processes are safely inferred from the structure, whose testimony is corroborated in part by Mashém's imperfect descriptions. The first step is the gathering of the carrizal from one of the patches growing about the three or four permanent fresh waters of Seriland, the canes being carefully selected for straightness, symmetry, and uniformity in size; these are then denuded of leaves and tassels, tied in bundles of convenient size (one seen on Tiburon contained 40 or 50 canes), and carried to the shore. In actual construction the canes are laid butt to butt, but overlapping 2 or 3 feet, the overlap being shifted this way and that with successive additions, so that the aggregate length of overlapping in the bundle reaches 10 or 12 feet—i. e., the full length of the body of the finished craft. The growing bundle is wrapped from time to time with lashings of mesquite root or maguey fiber, and kept in cylindrical form by constant rolling and by means of the lashing; though the cord used for the purpose is so slender as to do little more than serve the purposes

2: Kroeber E-5 (1930) 1931 NU31 Seri NU31

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THE SERI

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INTRODUCTION

The present paper is the first product of field studies made between January and March, 1930, in Arizona, Sonora, and Sinaloa, under a joint expedition of the Southwest Museum, Los Angeles, and the University of California. The financial contribution of the University was the gift of Mrs. Ethel W. Crocker. While the purpose of the trip was to define rather than solve problems, the following pages contain part of the positive observations obtained.

The Seri, who live on Tiburon Island, Sonora, in the Gulf of California, are often considered the wildest and most primitive tribe surviving in North America. They owe this repute partly to McGee's monograph about them, in the Seventeenth Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology. It is easy to read between the lines of this description that McGee leaned toward a romantic and imaginative interpretation of the Seri. Also, his actual contacts with the people themselves were brief, and hampered by imperfect communication. Moreover, the Seri have been for three hundred years in contact with Spaniards and Mexicans, part of the time even under direct mission control. It therefore seems doubtful whether their backwardness could be the result wholly of preserved primitiveness, and may not rather be attributable to a recalcitrant degeneration. In order to answer this question, and to place Seri culture at least tentatively among the other tribal cultures of the Southwest instead of leaving is as an unexplained and lurid abnormality, a brief visit to them was undertaken.

The success of this visit was due wholly to Sr. Roberto Thomson of Hermosillo and Rancho San Rafael, who is now the Mexican Government's *Jefe de Vigilancia* for the Seris, and in effect what in the United States would be known as Indian Agent for the tribe. He has protected and befriended them, kept them in turn in bounds, and secured some governmental assistance for them, under which they are making a beginning of adaptation to the modern world. At any rate, the mutual raidings and killings have stopped, and the Seri, though still very suspicious of most of the neighboring settlers and of strangers, look upon Sr. Thomson as their protector and friend. Without his introduction and experience, many less data could have been collected in a longer stay.

The Seri now live wholly on Tiburon Island. I was with them six days, half of them on the island. This is about as long a time as McGee spent with them—all of it at the cattle ranch of Costa Rica. McGee also explored the island and its camps at some length, but without encountering any Seri, who eluded his party.

Inasmuch as Mr. Edward H. Davis of Mesa Grande, California, has three times visited Tiburon to form an ethnological collection for the Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation, I attempted no examination of Seri material or economic culture, which Mr.